

America's B-1B Lancer takes to Russian sky

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Because of its ability to rapidly deliver massive quantities of weapons against any adversary in the world, the capabilities of America's B-1B Lancer may have once been feared by the former Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Now it is demonstrating its capabilities during the Moscow International Aviation and Space Salon held Aug. 16 to 21 at Ramenskoye Airfield here.

The B-1B, the backbone of America's long-range bomber force, is conducting daily maneuvers through the Russian sky at supersonic speed, and the aircraft and its advanced weapons system is being viewed with excitement by both Americans and Russians.



ZHUKOVSKY, Russia -- An American B-1B Lancer prepares to take off at Ramenskoye Airfield on Aug. 18 at the Moscow International Aviation and Space Salon here. The B-1B is performing daily aerial demonstrations at the air show. Other American aircraft on static display during the show include the F-15E Strike Eagle, F-16 Fighting Falcon, KC-10 Extender and KC-135 Stratotanker. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Mona Ferrell)

"It's an honor to fly the first B-1s into Russia," said Capt. Steve Jones, one of the B-1B pilots here from Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. "We're all humbled that the Russians invited us to the air show and are allowing us to participate."

The Lancer was initially developed in the 1970s as a replacement for the B-52 Stratofortress, an aircraft designed to deliver nuclear bombs into the former Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Demonstrating the B-1B's capabilities in front of a daily crowd of hundreds of thousands is a symbol of the friendship and international cooperation between the United States and its once-adversary, Captain Jones said.

"I think it shows how much progress our two nations have made since the Cold War," he said. "The fact the United States would bring one of its strategic bombers into this country and that the Russians will allow us to not only display the aircraft, but that we're able to fly it here ... it shows how diffused the whole Cold War has really become."

The finality of the Cold War is even more apparent when looking at the static displays, the captain said.

"We're parked (about) 300 feet from Russian weapons systems, some of which were designed primarily to shoot this aircraft down, and here we are parked right next to them at their air show," he said. "It's pretty cool."

Both the aircraft and the U.S. servicemembers are being well received, said Capt. Ryan Sweeney, a weapons systems officer for the aircraft.

"The Russians have been very accommodating and welcoming," he said. "After flying our profile here and landing, they thanked us for our demonstration. The mayor of Moscow also formally thanked us and presented us with a token of appreciation for our participation. It's obvious that they want us to feel welcome and we definitely do."

With the appreciation comes an inquisitiveness about the aircraft's strength, said Capt. David Black, the 34th Aircraft Maintenance Unit officer in charge of overseeing the B-1B's maintenance.

"With it's capability to go more than 900 mph, the Lancer is considered to be one of the premier fly-over jets; it represents American horsepower and makes the most noise," Captain Black said. "People seem to be very curious about it. They want us to tell them the difference between our aircraft and their bomber."

Although the B-1B and its crew normally average about 14 or 15 air shows a year, it does not make their participation in this year's Moscow show any less exciting, Captain Black said.

"We couldn't have been more warmly accepted," the captain said. "It's just a great honor and it's amazing to be here in Russia. I didn't think we'd ever be doing this in our lifetime."

This is the second time the United States has displayed military aircraft at the air show; the first time was in 2003. In 2001 the Department of Defense participated with a technology booth.

Other American aircraft showcased during the Moscow air show include the F-15E Strike Eagle, F-16 Fighting Falcon, KC-10 Extender and KC-135 Stratotanker. (Courtesy of U.S. Air Forces in Europe News Service)